

Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation Administration Committee

Final Meeting Summary *Approved October 27, 2000*

September 15, 2000

Present: Doug Hurley, Chair, Peter Bennett, Vice Chair, Representative Ruth Fisher, Robert Higgins, Senator Jim Horn, Connie Niva, Randy Scott, Judie Stanton

Absent: Rodney Brown, Greg Devereux, Paul McNeil, Tomio Moriguchi

The Committee Chair called the meeting to order at 9:15 a.m. The Committee approved the summary of the April 28th meeting as drafted.

The Chair explained that the Committee's goal between today and the next Committee meeting on October 27th is to determine where consensus exists on administrative issues, move forward in the areas it does not exist, and to review public comment. He also encouraged Committee members to focus on recommendations that have the greatest potential for reform - the most "bang for the buck."

Air Quality and Transportation

Paul Carr, Washington State Department of Ecology Air Quality Program, gave an overview of the air quality and transportation issues facing Washington State. Washington state deals with three major pollutants: particulate matter (PM¹⁰ and PM^{2.5}), ozone, and carbon monoxide (CO). Roughly half the air pollution in this area comes from transportation-related sources. Washington State is barely meeting federal standards for ozone & CO, and if current trends continue, portions of the state will be in violation. If a region of the state is in violation of federal standards, it risks losing federal transportation funds. Currently there is \$203 million at risk in Puget Sound, \$20 million at risk in Spokane, and \$15 million at risk in Clark County.

The Department of Ecology's current program was initiated in 1993 by the Federal Clean Air Act and State Clean Air Act, which require state transportation activities to conform to the State Implementation Plan for Clean Air. The program is jointly administered by air agencies and transportation agencies. Air agencies set up targets, while implementation is handled by

transportation agencies. Carr commented that the coordination and consultation between these agencies is done frequently and extremely well in Washington. The basic purposes of the program are:

1. Reinforce state goals for clean air and ensure that motor vehicle emissions targets for air quality are met.
2. Ensure that all transportation plans, programs and projects contribute to emissions reductions.
3. Ensure timely implementation of transportation control measures of projects specifically in the air plan.
4. Provide a process for transportation and air quality agencies to consider long term impacts of transportation plans, programs, and projects.
5. Provide a forum for public debate on air quality and transportation investments and how the air quality and mobility issues should be reconciled.

The basic approaches being used in the program are to focus on urban areas, address issues on a regional basis where appropriate, use a mix of strategies, embrace technology, improve land use, and encourage lifestyle changes such as carpooling and transit use.

Dennis McLerran, Puget Sound Air Pollution Control Agency, focused on the Puget Sound region, and summarized the likelihood and potential consequences of non-attainment status. The Puget Sound region is at risk, and McLerran conveyed the importance of the transportation component. He primarily discussed ozone since it is the most pressing issue for the region, and briefly discussed particulate matter (currently measured as PM¹⁰).

Ozone is a summertime problem surfacing when the region's temperature rises into the upper eighties and lower nineties a few times each summer. This hot, still, polluted air is locked into the basin, and in peak temperatures in afternoon, a photochemical reaction with sunlight occurs that produces ozone levels violating federal standards. Ozone comes from the following sources in the Puget Sound region:

- 40% - On-road mobile (cars & trucks)
- 18% - Non-road mobile (construction, boats)
- 11% - Stationary combustion (outdoor burning, small industrial)
- 23% - Stationary evaporation (evaporation of gasoline & solvents)
- 3% - Point Source (200 largest industrial sites)

Biogenic sources of VOC (Volatile Organic Compounds) such as trees and crops produce emissions that are non-reactive – they don't create ozone in the Puget Sound region. Years ago, the largest contributors to ozone were large industrial sites. As a result of major efforts to reduce point source emissions, that sector now only represents 3%. McLerran noted that the state's efforts

must now shift to transportation-related sources. McLerran briefly mentioned the other new air quality standard for particulate matter. $PM^{2.5}$ are the finest particles or soot released by outdoor burning and diesel fuel combustion. These fine particles, which are laced with toxins, penetrate normal lung defenses and thus are very dangerous.

McLerran listed the four main consequences of going into non-attainment status. First, there are public health impacts from breathing dirty air. Ozone causes respiratory problems, especially in persons with asthma and emphysema. Second, there are negative regulatory consequences. It would become much tougher to obtain air permits. Third, transportation funding could be put at risk. If the region does not make sufficient progress to clean up the air, the federal government can withhold transportation funds from projects that would impair air quality, which are often road capacity projects. Finally, there are potential economic development consequences. If the Puget Sound region becomes an ozone non-attainment area, it would lose the status of one of the “most livable cities,” and may put another region at a competitive advantage for business expansion and location.

What is Puget Sound Air Pollution Control Agency doing to avoid non-attainment? McLerran established a program with local oil refineries, whereas for the past two summers, they have voluntarily produced cleaner gasoline called low RVP gasoline. Low RVP gasoline has lower butane and pentane contents, and reduces mobile source emissions by 10%. Low RVP gasoline does cost \$.01 per gallon more than normal gasoline to produce. The agency is also working with a stakeholder group to develop more permanent reductions in smog-forming emissions. Some candidate strategies include:

- Reformulated gasoline
- California motor vehicle standards for new
- Modifications to the automobile emissions testing program
- Increasing penetration of clean fuel vehicles such as CNG and Hybrid-power vehicles
- Refinements to existing vapor recovery program

Between 2004 and 2007, new motor vehicle standards and new fuel standards will go into effect. But the new technology employed to meet those standards won't substantively decrease ozone levels until 2010 - 2015. Between now and 2010, the region and state need to take steps to address the problem.

Kelly McGourty, Puget Sound Regional Council of Governments (PSRC), presented information on the PSRC's draft metropolitan transportation plan and its impacts on air quality. PSRC generates long-range regional emissions estimates for the Puget Sound region. The estimates are of on-road mobile emissions, are based on the existing transportation system and specific known future transportation investments, and extend to the year 2030.

PSRC uses three investment package alternatives in forecasting emissions. The first scenario uses the current 1995 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). The second scenario is MTP plus highway system enhancements. The third scenario is MTP plus system management enhancement (increased transit.) McGourty showed the Committee forecasts for carbon monoxide (CO) and ozone levels. Though the allowance, or budget, for CO and ozone levels is not fixed yet; in all three scenarios pollution levels rose above the estimated allowance. The Chair noted that in the CO forecasts, scenario two (investing in more roads) resulted in the lowest level of CO pollution. McGourty explained that CO is a congested intersection problem, so, smoothing out the flow of traffic would decrease CO levels. McGourty conveyed the need for new transportation investments to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT), smooth out traffic flow, and eliminate bottlenecks.

Most of the areas in Washington are currently in compliance with federal air quality standards. The current trend is that reductions in average emissions per mile are offsetting increases in vehicle miles traveled. Older vehicles lacking emissions controls are retiring, and consumers are replacing them with new cleaner cars. However, within the next five to ten years, this trend is expected to change. Few older vehicles lacking emissions controls will still be on the road. Average emissions per mile are likely to stabilize, and increasing vehicle miles traveled may lead to increasing total emissions.

The Chair noted that by looking at the information provided by PSRC, the following conclusion should be made: if the Puget Sound region sticks with current law, air quality and congestion levels worsen dramatically. He noted that this information could be used to make the case to a broader constituency that the region and state need to act.

Some Committee members questioned the significance of air quality issues in Washington. They questioned how to deal with the fact that it seems like violations happen as a result of the weather (which we cannot control), and noted that many areas of the state have made tremendous improvement in the past few decades. The presenters responded with the following points:

- Real health complications occur when federal standards for air pollution are exceeded, even if that only happens two or three times per year. If you're exercising outside, the pollution can burn and sear your lungs. Persons with asthma and emphysema are especially affected.
- Washington needs to face the future; population growth and increased VMT are realities we need to anticipate and deal with.

Governance

Chris Mefford, consultant to the Commission, presented a governance matrix that gave an overview of the characteristics of Washington State transportation agencies as well as comparable information on SANDAG (San Diego's MPO), the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA), and Portland METRO. The notable differences between Washington organizations and other states are in jurisdiction and charge. Georgia has a stricter form of the Growth Management Act (GMA),

which gives GRTA purview over any new land use developments through the allocation of state funds. Georgia's stricter model was invoked as a result of violations in federal air quality standards. It was noted that GRTA is only 2 years old, so the real effects of such a strict model have not yet been fully observed.

Kjristine Lund, project manager of the Commission, explained that the governance matrix is designed to be a tool that the Committee can pick and choose from. Committee members do not necessarily have to choose one model and endorse that for Washington State. They can choose characteristics they like from one model and characteristics they like from another model, and put them together to form a new model for Washington State.

It was noted that some good work is being done on a regional basis with Washington tribes, but that more coordination in planning and funding between regional councils and tribes is needed.

Permit Reform

Dennis Sellin, consultant to the Commission, reviewed one major area in which substantive reform can be achieved - the 404 Army Corps Wetlands Permit. Sellin and Committee member Rodney Brown have identified two states in which the Corps 404 permit authority is delegated to the state: New Jersey (since 1994) and Michigan (since 1984). Turnaround time is substantially shorter; what was before a 2 + year process is now, in those states, a 90 - 180 day process. Both states have characterized their programs as successful, resulting in more predictability and accountability. The authority for this delegation already exists in the Federal Clean Water Act Legislation. To acquire authority in Washington, the State Legislature would need to approve it. States do not receive federal money to administer the program. There is, however, another permit (401) that is the state equivalent of the Corps 404 permit, which states are already required to process. New Jersey and Michigan found that when they assumed the Corps 404 permit program, they could administer it with existing staff because so much overlap exists between the two permits. Neither state had to impose new fees to administer the program. There are differences between Washington and the two states though. Both states have permit fees for these permits, whereas Washington does not. Also, both states have more staff distributed throughout the state. The Chair was enthusiastic that acquiring delegation of the 404 Army Corps Wetlands Permit would have substantial effects on the permitting process in Washington State.

Next Meeting

The next Committee meeting is scheduled for **Friday, October 27, 2000, 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.**, at the SeaTac Holiday Inn in SeaTac.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.